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Strengthening of the United Nations system

Views of Member States, members of the specialized agencies, observers, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations from all regions on the report of the Secretary-General on arrangements and practices for the interaction of non-governmental organizations in all activities of the United Nations system

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. Introduction

1. In its decision 1996/297 of 25 July 1996, the Economic and Social Council decided to recommend that the General Assembly examine, at its fifty-fifth session, the question of the participation of non-governmental organizations in all areas of the work of the United Nations. Such request led to the issuance of the report of the Secretary-General (A/53/170) on arrangements and practices for the interaction of non-governmental organizations in all activities of the United Nations system. The Assembly had requested in its decision 52/453 of 19 December 1997 that, once prepared, the report be circulated for consideration. Having considered this report at its fifty-third session, the Assembly adopted decision 53/452 of 17 December 1998, whereby it decided to request the Secretary-General to:

(a) Seek the views of Member States, members of the specialized agencies, observers and intergovernmental organizations, as well as the views of non-governmental organizations from all regions, on the above-mentioned report;

(b) Submit a further report to the General Assembly, at its fifty-fourth session, taking into account the submissions received.

2. Accordingly, a note (NGORPT2/1) of 26 February 1999 was sent by the Secretary-General to all concerned. Pursuant to the request of the General Assembly in its decision 53/452, the present report takes into account the submissions by the Secretary-General from various Member States, observers, members of specialized agencies, and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

3. The Secretariat contacted 183 Member States of the United Nations and 9 observers, as well as 16 specialized agencies, 31 intergovernmental organizations and the 1,603 non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. In its efforts to reach non-governmental organizations not based at Headquarters, the Office of External Relations collaborated with the Department of Public Information of the United Nations Secretariat to contact the network of 67 United Nations Information Centres and Services and used electronic means to reach out to non-governmental organizations worldwide to seek their views on the previous report. The note requesting comments was sent to networks of non-governmental organizations dealing with non-governmental organizations from developing and least developed countries. Announcements were also made during the meetings of the Commission for Social Development which is well attended by non-governmental organizations from developing countries.

4. Comments were received from 27 Member States (Algeria, Argentina, Canada, the People's Republic of China, Colombia, Cuba, Egypt, Germany (on behalf of the States Members of the United Nations that are members of the European Union), the Republic of Korea, Morocco, the Russian Federation, the United States of America, and Venezuela), 1 observer (Switzerland), 10 specialized agencies and intergovernmental organizations and 130 non-governmental organizations. Those comments are summarized hereinunder. Owing to limitations established by the General Assembly on the length of the reports, the views cannot be entirely reproduced; however, all submissions are available in their entirety for review in the Secretariat.

II. Background information

5. The previous report focused on the practical cooperation among the organs, programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations and non-governmental organizations as regards the execution of projects. It presented the steps taken to enhance close collaboration and dialogue between the United Nations and civil society. That report also tried to address key issues such as the need for the United Nations to ensure a balanced geographical representation of non-governmental organizations and ways in which the United Nations can answer the growing demands of non-governmental organizations for access to information and increased participation.

6. The present report includes comments and suggestions submitted by Member States, specialized agencies, and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations on ways to adapt and improve the relationships between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations.

III. General remarks

7. Nearly all Member States that responded recognized the important contribution by non-governmental organizations to the activities of the United Nations. Most of them stressed the central role of non-governmental organizations as essential and indispensable partners for Governments and the international community and as a driving force in the conceptualization and implementation of decisions taken at major United Nations conferences. Although Member States found document A/53/170 to be

comprehensive and informative in providing a good overview of existing rules and modalities, they felt that some aspects needed further elaboration. A number of Member States suggested that the report give more careful consideration to the legal issues governing the interaction of non-governmental organizations in activities of the United Nations as well as to the financial implications of the relationship between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations. Some Member State replies expressed the view that the report should consider more deeply the question of participation of non-governmental organizations from developing countries and the important issue of performance review.

8. In their responses, the specialized agencies of the United Nations system and intergovernmental organizations indicated that the Secretary-General's report accurately reflected the growing role and participation of non-governmental organizations in the work of the United Nations and the agencies as well as in public affairs and governance at local, national and global levels. In particular, they stressed that the report served as a useful overview of institutional implications of new forms of partnerships in development cooperation. A number of specialized agencies of the United Nations system reported that they were currently reviewing their policies on collaboration with non-governmental organizations and found the report to be a useful reference tool in this regard. Most said that the report provided a helpful summary of evolving interaction between non-governmental organizations worldwide and the United Nations system and was useful in underlining the commonalities as well as differences in practices within the United Nations system, in line with particular mandates, needs and non-governmental organization constituencies.

9. The Non-Governmental Organizations Section of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat expressed its strong support for the efforts undertaken to improve coordination with United Nations bodies and the specialized agencies in order to examine the principles and practices related to their consultative relationship with non-governmental organizations throughout the United Nations system. During the discussion of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations on the issue of accreditation, the Committee recognized the important contribution of non-governmental organizations to the work of the United Nations. Clearly, that role continues to expand. This year, for example, the President of the Economic and Social Council allowed a limited number of non-governmental organizations to participate in the high-level segment of the Council. The Non-Governmental Organizations Section advised and assisted the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CONGO) and two major international non-governmental organizations in their preparations. For the first time, representatives of these organizations took the floor during the high-level segment to present the views and proposals of their organizations.

10. Almost all of the non-governmental organizations that responded welcomed the Secretary-General's report as a comprehensive and thoughtful overview of relations between the United Nations and the non-governmental organization community. Many found the report useful in an informational sense. They felt that a serious attempt had been made to assess current arrangements and to consider how these might be developed in the future. They appreciated the opportunity to contribute to the appraisal, and said they hoped this open approach would continue to characterize United Nations activities in this area.

11. Some non-governmental organizations were concerned that the report created the perception that the increasing number of non-governmental organizations represented a threat to the system or a problem that needed to be dealt with. They stressed that the growth of non-governmental organizations was very positive for the United Nations system, providing an extraordinary opportunity for Member States, the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations to make the United Nations a more relevant, vibrant and forceful institution. They noted that, while there had been an increase in the number of non-governmental organizations being granted status, as described by the report, it would be helpful to have statistics on the numbers of non-governmental organization representatives that actually participated in meetings held at United Nations Headquarters or other United Nations locations.

12. Many non-governmental organizations felt that the report did not sufficiently address the role of non-governmental organizations in shaping decisions taken at the United Nations. Some non-governmental organizations believed that the report did not offer suggestions with respect to building support for non-governmental organizations among Governments and within the Secretariat despite the statements of senior-level United Nations officials that non-governmental organizations were essential to the process of policy formation and in the execution of policies. In their view, the report should have attempted to build that support and provide specific examples of non-governmental organization best practices at all levels. General support was expressed by many non-governmental organizations for access to the General Assembly, increased training of United Nations staff assigned to work with non-

governmental organizations, free use of the optical disk system (ODS), the establishment of a trust fund to assist the participation and capacity-building of developing country non-governmental organizations, and better access to documentation before, during and after meetings.

IV. Views on specific issues

Institutional arrangements

13. The Secretary-General's report (A/53/170) covered the existing arrangements established within the various United Nations bodies, programmes and specialized agencies that governed relationships between the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations. These arrangements vary and range from consultative status and memoranda of understanding to the establishment of advisory committees. As to the diversity of arrangements, two differing points of view were expressed in the responses submitted by Member States. Some observed that there was no single legal framework that could serve as a model. Others suggested that procedures to deal with non-governmental organizations should be standardized and harmonized throughout the United Nations system. The Non-Governmental Organizations Section of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs noted that the question of harmonization of standards was of particular concern in light of one of the provisions of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996, in which the Council established the legal framework for relations between non-governmental organizations and the United Nations through consultative status with the Council. In paragraph 14 of the resolution, it is stated that the Council would take into account whether non-governmental organizations in formal relationship with a specialized agency might be admitted to consultative (Roster) status with the Council. The resolution, however, specifies no requirement to the effect that these NGOs meet the stringent criteria of those passing through the established procedures for Council approval. There is, moreover, no established mechanism for monitoring non-governmental organizations on the Roster. To remedy this situation, the Non-Governmental Organizations Section of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, which is responsible for keeping account of the activities of non-governmental organizations in all categories of consultative status with the Council, is therefore undertaking a review of all non-governmental organizations holding Roster status with a view to identifying the organizations that continue to contribute to the work of the United Nations or other United Nations bodies. Such organizations will be encouraged to seek special consultative status with the Council while those found to be inactive will be referred to the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations for review. At present, there are nearly twice as many non-governmental organizations in the Roster category by virtue of their status with specialized agencies and other United Nations bodies as those that have fulfilled the Council's own requirements. In relation to its review, the Non-Governmental Organizations Section has initiated contact with the relevant United Nations bodies and specialized agencies to update and expand its information on non-governmental organizations falling under their purview. It is intended that this collaboration with other entities of the United Nations system will become a regular activity to enable the Section to monitor non-governmental organization compliance with the conditions set out in Council resolution 1996/31.

14. It was also observed that agencies, funds and programmes must work together with non-governmental organizations to establish appropriate accountability and review mechanisms in regard to creating and developing their working relations. Such mechanisms should, first and foremost, institute transparency in all aspects of the United Nations-non-governmental organization relationship, particularly in the establishment of decision-making process, ethical standards and measurable programme indicators. The arrangements between non-governmental organizations and the agencies, funds and programmes must be amenable to independent verification, inspection and assessment.

15. It was generally agreed that the United Nations derived its mandate to work with non-governmental organizations from Article 71 of the Charter of the United Nations. In submitting their views, most Member States reiterated the significance of this Article which enables the Economic and Social Council to make suitable arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organizations. Some Member States were of the opinion however, that Article 71 is the exception that confirms the rule. The United Nations, and the specialized agencies, are inter-State and intergovernmental organizations, which have the capacity to call upon non-governmental organizations to cooperate with them within the bounds of their constitutive and institutional design which is essentially governmental. It was felt, therefore, that Article 71 limits, in principle, the possibility of cooperation between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations, *ratione personae*, to the Council. At the same time, it excludes them, *ratione materiae*, from dealing with all other such questions as remain the private domain of other organs of the United Nations by confining non-governmental organization activities undertaken with the Organization to economic and

social matters only. Nevertheless, some Member States believed that Article 71 allowed the Council to use its discretion in designating its interlocutors and in choosing the modalities of consultation with them.

16. Using this prerogative, the Economic and Social Council first adopted resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968, which outlined relations between the Council and non-governmental organizations, and later adopted resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996 which governs their relationship at present. In this regard, several Member States that responded were of the opinion that the strengthening of the role of non-governmental organizations in United Nations activities should be carried out strictly in the light of the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations as well as of Council resolutions 1296 (XLIV) and 1996/31. It was specified that a distinction should be made between the executive role of States and that of non-governmental organizations which, in their view, have proved to be efficient in the social sphere, in the dissemination of information, provision of advisory services, and assistance to the specialized agencies of the United Nations system, among others functions. They stressed that any attempt to give non-governmental organizations a status closer to that of States would require a revision of the Charter of the United Nations. In the view of several Member States that responded, the contributions of non-governmental organizations undoubtedly enrich the deliberative process in the various spheres, but their participation in the decision-making process, beyond the contributions that they make at present, could give rise to significant distortions and, among other things, would undermine the principle of the sovereign equality of States and equitable consideration of the interests of all the regions of the world.

17. Some Member States were of the view that a revision of the relationship between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations was timely. It was felt that a broader legal framework than that established by Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 should govern the relationship between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations. Accordingly, discussions on new approaches, methods and responses throughout the United Nations system in order to ensure participation of non-governmental organizations should be conducted within the Committee on non-governmental organizations. For a Member State, greater participation of non-governmental organizations and their interaction with the United Nations should be governed by transparent arrangements previously agreed upon by States for implementation by the Secretariat and the United Nations system. These arrangements should reflect the diversity of the political, economic and social bodies of the United Nations. Even though consultative status with the Council (governed by Council resolution 1996/31) remains at the core of the formal relationship between the non-governmental organizations and the United Nations, one Member State noted that such interaction had gone beyond what was stipulated in the resolution. This was true especially with regard to cooperation between the non-governmental organizations and United Nations subsidiary bodies involved in humanitarian and relief operations, and development. Another Member State urged all agencies, funds and programmes, in the spirit of Council resolution 1996/31 and transparency, to update, formulate and publish, where appropriate, their policies, rules and procedures governing their relationships with non-governmental organizations. While recognizing that there might need to be a broader legal framework governing the relationship between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations than is provided by Council resolution 1996/31 and that there was a need to update and revise that resolution, the Non-Governmental Organization Section of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs indicated that it would support equally strongly the suggestion that, for the immediate future, policies, rules and procedures should be guided by the spirit of Council resolution 1996/31. In this connection, the Non-Governmental Organizations Section has already entered into a dialogue with some specialized agencies on the subject of the rules, defining criteria and parameters in respect of their relationship with non-governmental organizations and how their requirements compare with those established for consultative status with the Council.

18. Both the legal and financial implications of the relationship between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations were of great concern to Member States. Some of those that replied were of the opinion that the report should address more fully the legal and financial implications that would be incurred if the current arrangements were modified in order to enhance non-governmental organization participation, and recommended that these issues be resolved beforehand. The majority of the Member States agreed that greater non-governmental organization participation should not lead to additional financial burdens on Member States. Several Member States suggested that the Secretary-General elaborate on these issues and also on the responsibilities and role of non-governmental organizations in determining ways and means aimed at promoting and enhancing the relationship with the United Nations.

19. It was recalled that the principle aim of Economic and Social Council decision 1996/297 was to allow the

participation of non-governmental organizations in all United Nations activities and consequently enlarge the field of participation limited to economic and social activities. Therefore, a careful consideration of the legal and financial implications would help better define the relationship between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations. Should the relationship entail interaction, cooperation, participation or merely attendance at meetings?

20. According to one Member State, the report should review the financial implications of non-governmental organization participation in activities of the United Nations system such as conference scheduling, document distribution, interpretation and secretarial services. Such information should be made available to Member States in order that the situation might be better evaluated and the appropriate decisions might be taken, especially in the light of the current financial crisis. The same Member State believed that, at the moment, the limited financial resources of the United Nations ought to be devoted to programmes and matters of concern to Member States. It also felt the report should touch upon the relevant legal issues governing the interaction with non-governmental organizations.

21. On the matter of institutional arrangements, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) suggested that for the United Nations system as a whole, the United Nations might wish to make a clearer distinction between policy dialogue (that is to say, more formal consultations such as those taking place through the Economic and Social Council and, by extension, governing bodies such as the Human Rights Commission and the Commission on Sustainable Development) and implementing partnerships that ensure operational cooperation with non-governmental organizations at the country level. In UNESCO's view, this might lead to the possibility of reverting to the practice of "reserving" consultative status with the Council for international or regional non-governmental organizations and opening up a new "operational" status to non-governmental organizations at all levels, including at the national level for the programme implementation side of the United Nations system operations (including the funds and programmes). Specialized agencies should continue to adopt their own specific arrangements, providing both for policy dialogue and for implementing partnerships. Reserving consultative status with the Council for international and regional non-governmental organizations would, in UNESCO's opinion, have the added advantage of "disengorging" the United Nations Secretariat's non-governmental organization Section and Committee on non-governmental organizations, and avoiding the problems of "regional balance" which are beginning to emerge regarding the geographical origin of the national non-governmental organizations currently granted to consultative status.

22. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) maintained that the very definition of "international non-governmental organization" sometimes used in the report did not properly reflect the wide range of differences marking institutions in the non-governmental organization arena, in particular as far as the relationships between large non-governmental organizations based in donor countries and networks of non-governmental organizations from developing countries were concerned. The consistency of formal and informal arrangements regulating, on the one hand, the non-governmental organization consultative capacity at the policy level and, on the other hand, the "growing operational partnership" at the programme/project level could have been further elaborated on in the report, according to OECD.

23. The World Health Organization (WHO) noted that it had at present only one category of formal relations with non-governmental organizations and that only international non-governmental organizations were eligible. In the new policy relations with non-governmental organizations currently under consideration, WHO would apply more flexibility in its criteria for admission of non-governmental organizations into official relations in order to admit more multisectoral and development non-governmental organizations and increase its partnership with local grass-roots organizations.

24. Many non-governmental organizations found the section on institutional arrangements to be a valuable guide in itself and welcomed the clear outline of procedures that currently existed. They pointed out, however, that it was, for many non-governmental organizations, the first clear picture of the various methods of consultation that they had. Some requested that the report should form the basis of a directory, to be issued to non-governmental organizations upon accreditation. It was also proposed that each non-governmental organization should receive an orientation/welcome booklet and/or session upon obtaining formal status with the United Nations. The information should include specifics about the non-governmental organization liaison offices in the United Nations system, including names, contacts, locations. The booklet should reinforce mutual rights and responsibilities, as well as practical guidelines for the functioning of non-governmental organizations within physical structures and protocols of the United Nations, including how to follow debates and so forth. In this regard, it was noted by the Non-Governmental Organizations Section of the Department of Economic and

Social Affairs that members of the Committee on non-governmental organizations had also proposed that the Secretariat examine the feasibility of conducting annual briefing sessions for non-governmental organizations on this particular issue and the possibility of requesting reports from the Secretary-General and the bureaux of the functional commissions on the various aspects of the participation of non-governmental organizations in the functional commissions. With reference to informing non-governmental organizations about the accreditation process, it was reported that a number of guidelines had been issued in both United Nations working languages by the non-governmental organization Section to assist non-governmental organizations in the preparation of their application questionnaires and quadrennial reports. It is anticipated that the positive impact of these guidelines will be reflected in improved submissions during the year 2000 and thereafter. In addition, a series of informative workshops and seminars has been organized during the various intergovernmental meetings held at Headquarters and during a number of international non-governmental organization events held throughout the year. This training provides guidance on how to comply with the technical requirements of applying for consultative status as well as explains the formal rights and responsibilities of non-governmental organizations in consultative status. Moreover, the workshops explore with participants ways to enhance their contributions to the Committee's work in the economic and social sectors. Several of these informative meetings were conducted jointly with the Department of Public Information of the United Nations Secretariat Non-Governmental Organizations Section.

25. A group of non-governmental organizations felt that the report described but did not systematically evaluate how the various existing arrangements with non-governmental organizations were functioning. They proposed that the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) examine the specific ways in which the Secretariat was or was not achieving what had been outlined in Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31. Some non-governmental organizations were of the opinion that the use and implementation of Council resolution 1996/31 had not been dealt with adequately by the report. This resolution, which was supposed to provide a minimum standard for the participation of non-governmental organizations in the Council and its subsidiary bodies, had, in their view, been applied inconsistently. Further clarification of the language of Council resolution 1996/31 was called for, in terms of objectives, functions, responsibilities and methods of operation. It was felt that this would help each non-governmental organization make self-assessments of its own activities for better functioning and advancement.

26. For its part, the non-governmental organization Section of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs has developed a comprehensive database to facilitate an in-depth review and therefore closer monitoring of the activities reported by non-governmental organizations in status with the Economic and Social Council in their quadrennial reports.

27. Other respondents specified that the report should give greater attention to part VII of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 on the participation of non-governmental organizations in international conferences convened by the United Nations and in their preparatory process. While this had been mentioned in paragraph 58 of last year's report, this information should have been more visible to Member States and all other interested parties because it presented a model for non-governmental organization accreditation and access to special sessions of the General Assembly and perhaps the Assembly itself and its Main Committees. Consideration of this model, in their view, could avoid an otherwise lengthy process of creating new and different arrangements for the Assembly and its committees and raise the possibility of one Secretariat unit handling non-governmental organization accreditation with both the Council and the Assembly, thereby contributing to efficient use of United Nations resources. At present, the non-governmental organization Section of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs is responsible for non-governmental organization accreditation and support to international conferences and to the preparatory committees therefor. Since its nineteenth special session, the General Assembly has approved special modalities for the participation of non-governmental organizations in those special sessions. The non-governmental organization Section is responsible for certifying that non-governmental organizations and their individual participants meet established criteria in order to attend.

28. There were some comments on the Inter-Departmental Working Group on Non-Governmental Organizations (IDWG), an internal United Nations Secretariat group established by Secretary-General's bulletin ST/SGB/209 of 21 December 1984. This Group is a coordination mechanism for United Nations staff dealing with non-governmental organization matters. It was the view of many non-governmental organizations that IDWG had not yielded concrete, visible benefits for non-governmental organizations and that the basic responsibility for dealing with non-governmental organizations needed to be given higher profile within the United Nations system. They

questioned IDWG as a valid vehicle for discussions, given the absence of non-governmental organizations from this group. According to non-governmental organizations, the report should evaluate in a critical way the Secretariat methods in dealing with non-governmental organizations that did not respect the decorum of the United Nations. Given the fact that some Member States were seeking to develop a code of conduct for non-governmental organizations, the report ought to evaluate what had or had not been done to instil a climate of proper conduct among non-governmental organizations or how the relevant units in the Secretariat had handled breaches of appropriate behaviour with administrative measures. The result, in the view of non-governmental organizations, had been a case of Member States exerting pressure to propose onerous rules for the entire class of non-governmental organizations rather than of the Secretariat exercising its prerogative to take disciplinary action against those very few non-governmental organizations that had not conducted themselves properly.

29. With regard to the code of conduct of non-governmental organizations, the non-governmental organization Section of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs noted that this question was addressed by the Committee on non-governmental organizations on a regular basis. One of the items in the Committee's agenda, entitled "Review of the methods of work of the Committee", focuses on two important issues related to the non-governmental organizations' code of conduct. One concerns the complaints brought to the attention of the Committee on non-governmental organization misconduct; the other refers to the process of accreditation of representatives of non-governmental organizations to United Nations meetings and special events. In addition, informal consultations with CONGO and other non-governmental organizations take place during the Committee's session and throughout the year.

Participation of non-governmental organizations from all regions and establishment of a trust fund

30. The question of the participation of non-governmental organizations from developing countries was a concern to most Member States that responded. They felt that measures should be taken in order to give non-governmental organizations from developing countries the opportunity to fully participate in United Nations activities and to correct the prevailing geographical imbalance. Efforts are being made system-wide to promote their role and participation and give them the opportunity to fully contribute by, for instance, decentralizing and encouraging their participation. One such effort is undertaken by the non-governmental organization Section, which in December of every year, distributes to non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, a hard copy of the annual calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for the coming year. This year, the calendar will also be accessible from the Section's Web page. It should be noted that the calendar being prepared for the year 2000 will include information about national, regional and international meetings and conferences specially dedicated to the new millennium, in addition to the many special annual events that take place within the United Nations system. These events will review in depth and evaluate the past work of the non-governmental organization community and develop new initiatives for the coming years. Some Member States believed that an expansion of the role of non-governmental organizations throughout the United Nations system would result in a solid, constructive and mutually beneficial relationship. While emphasizing that decision-making must remain within the exclusive purview of Member States, they considered that access for non-governmental organizations would contribute to a significant increase in transparency and accountability in the United Nations, and improve the quality of such decision-making. Most of the non-governmental organizations that have the capacity to be represented and exert an influence in United Nations forums on a periodic basis come from the main developed countries. At the same time, non-governmental organizations entering this partnership have the responsibility to contribute positively to the attainment of the United Nations ideals and to seek effective, efficient means of contributing to the work of the United Nations.

31. The non-governmental organization Section of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs indicated that it was aware that the need to create channels for participation in the work of the United Nations system was particularly acute in the case of national non-governmental organizations from developing countries and those from countries with economies in transition, many of whom needed assistance in building their capacity to work with the United Nations. Lack of financial means and inadequate access to relevant information also greatly limit the contributions of such non-governmental organizations to the policy dialogue conducted in the United Nations forums. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs has designed an outreach programme to address this situation by means of training workshops and the introduction of a variety of communications mechanisms. Similarly the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has also introduced a number of measures aimed

at strengthening its relationship with civil society organizations and enhancing their participation in its operational programmes, particularly at the country level. In light of their shared concern, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs has drawn up a proposal that seeks to build on these initiatives through a collaborative partnership that would benefit from the comparative advantage of the UNDP as field offices in establishing direct contact with national, regional and subregional non-governmental organizations so as to assist these organizations in adding a substantive, more policy-oriented component to their work in economic and social development.

32. Most Member States responding were in favour of the proposal for the establishment of a contributory fund to permit non-governmental organizations from developing and least developed countries as well as countries in transition to be more involved in the work of the Organization. However, some Member States warned against the difficulties inherent in establishing criteria for the selection of such beneficiaries and called for clear guidelines in order to ensure transparency, equality and accountability. Either a mechanism could be established to examine and approve the granting of assistance by the proposed trust fund or this process could be incorporated into the mandate of the Committee on non-governmental organizations. For a number of Member States, capacity-building and targeted financial assistance were seen as significant components in the participation of non-governmental organizations in the work of the United Nations. In this regard, one Member State suggested that non-governmental organizations from developed countries dedicate a small portion of their annual budgets to grant institutional support to select organizations from developing countries.

33. In their replies, several Member States expressed concern that the proposed trust fund would cause additional expenses to be incurred by the budget of the United Nations, hence by Member States. Others stressed that such a proposal would be welcome as long as the Fund was well endowed and well administered. One Member State also stressed that the trust fund should not be endowed through voluntary contributions only and that one should consider funding the core of its resources from the regular budget of the United Nations.

34. As far as accreditation with the Organization was concerned, it was felt that this should remain within the competence of the Economic and Social Council, through a serious vetting system. The mechanism of selection should take into account two concerns: the unequal participation of non-governmental organizations from all over the world, especially from developing countries, and the financial aspect, which can be an enabling factor for some organizations or an impediment for the participation of others. One Member State underlined the responsibility of non-governmental organizations for the actions of their accredited representatives during meetings of the Council and of its subsidiary bodies. It was noted that, with the increase in the number of non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council, there has also been an increase in the enjoyment of consultative privileges by some non-governmental organizations, including the unacceptable practice of granting accreditation at meetings to persons representing organizations that had not previously been recognized as members or associates of the organization that had received consultative status. Many non-governmental organizations advocated standardized accreditation of non-governmental organizations across all activities of the United Nations system. It should not be necessary for a non-governmental organization to apply individually to each section of the United Nations in which participation is desired: a standardized application should exist.

35. One of the themes in almost all of the responses from the specialized agencies and intergovernmental organizations was enhancing the participation of non-governmental organizations, particularly non-governmental organizations from developing countries, in the United Nations system. Many reported that they had a long history of cooperating and working with non-governmental organizations on an operational level. WHO indicated that it would, in line with the Secretary-General's recommendation that NGO liaison offices be strengthened in terms of both financial and human resources, "make a major investment in the process of building partnerships with non-governmental organizations as part of a new policy". In order to steer this proposed new strategy, WHO said it would establish an organization-wide working group on non-governmental organization partnerships to identify best practices and models for collaboration between WHO, non-governmental organizations, Governments and other United Nations organizations. The process of building new partnerships organization-wide would include non-governmental organization focal points, joint committees and other mechanisms for collaboration, both at WHO headquarters in Geneva and in WHO Regional and Country Offices, including WHO liaison offices. WHO indicated that "in accordance with evolving practices in other UN agencies ... the proposed strategy for expanded relations with non-governmental organizations will include non-governmental organization participation in planning, implementation and review of WHO technical programmes, as well as overall

policy and strategy development. WHO intends to establish mechanisms for evaluation of this new collaboration, drawing on continuous feedback from the field and working experiences at all levels of the Organization". The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) reported that a thorough review of FAO's cooperation with non-governmental organizations and other civil society organizations had been undertaken. The resulting strategy and plan of action would soon be published and would identify key activities in four areas: information-sharing and analysis, policy dialogue, field programmes and resource mobilization.

36. A number of the specialized agencies of the United Nations system indicated that it was important for the United Nations system agencies/programmes to share experience and best practices in order to enhance non-governmental organization participation. FAO, for example, stressed that it was imperative to share experience and best practices and to plan "joint action to enhance partnerships with civil society". FAO added that the United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS) — in collaboration with the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ) on operational collaboration with civil society — was proving to be an effective mechanism for exchange and cooperation. FAO said it was in the process of developing a "partners page" on its Web site which would be linked to the United Nations page. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) noted that section V of the report of the Secretary-General had also referred to United Nations activities related to capacity-building for national non-governmental organizations. UNIDO reported that, at a recent session of CCPOQ, it had become apparent that a number of United Nations system agencies were actively involved in civil society organizations capacity-building and institutional development (17 United Nations system agencies had participated in the survey). UNIDO explained that these activities entailed areas ranging from strengthening institutional capacity of civil society organizations to technical know-how, management accountability advocacy and legal literacy. OECD also stressed that participatory development and good governance had become central concerns in Development Assistance Committee (DAC) core functions.

37. General support for the report's emphasis on participation of non-governmental organizations from developing countries was expressed by many non-governmental organizations responding, in terms both of attendance at intergovernmental meetings and international conferences, and of capacity-building of organizations. The participation of more developing-country non-governmental organizations in intergovernmental meetings had raised awareness among civil society actors about their important role in shaping and integrating global concerns like transboundary emissions, marine activities and disaster alleviation. It had also increased regional cooperation among non-governmental organizations by providing opportunities for networking and sharing of information and experiences. Some non-governmental organizations proposed that the United Nations and its bodies continue to decentralize. Field offices should be empowered to deal with country programmes and to facilitate local non-governmental organization consultations and participation. The need for further improvement of non-governmental organization participation in the areas not only of implementation, but also of preparation of projects and programmes, involvement in research and monitoring, policy advocacy and impact assessments in all areas of activities through United Nations agencies was stressed by many non-governmental organizations. A great number of non-governmental organizations proposed that the annual Department of Public Information three-day conference be changed or complemented by smaller ad hoc meetings between similarly focused non-governmental organizations and United Nations departments, as contributing a better utilization of scarce time resources. The annual United Nations/Department of Public Information conference should not be always held at United Nations Headquarters. Moving its location every year would lead to a rise in the number of countries whose non-governmental organizations could attend, rather than to a rise in numbers only.

38. The lack of financial means for non-governmental organizations from developing countries to participate in United Nations conferences and deliberations is a severe and urgent problem. Paragraph 79 of the report of the Secretary-General mentioned the possible establishment of a trust fund to assist the participation of non-governmental organizations from developing and least developed countries. It was proposed that the United Nations should make available funds through its agencies for capacity-building to strengthen effectiveness of developing countries' non-governmental organizations and that the Secretary-General should issue an appeal to international donor agencies or donors to contribute liberally to such a fund. It is important that the United Nations support for developing countries' non-governmental organization participation take an institutional form. Assessment reports on capacity-building should be made and disseminated to non-governmental organizations to help them understand the key elements of success and failures and to be better prepared to receive

these programmes. It was suggested that the non-governmental organization Section of the Department of Public Information and NGLS should provide financial assistance to non-governmental organization representatives from developing countries to ensure adequate regional balance among non-governmental organizations at United Nations meetings, conferences and policy dialogues. It was proposed that NGLS prepare a comprehensive profile of non-governmental organization participation in global conferences and parallel civil society forums. The profile should contain data on non-governmental organization participation such as geographical distribution: national, regional, international; functional specialization; size; duration of existence and so on, as part of a system of frequent data gathering about non-governmental organization activities and their level of cooperation with the United Nations.

39. Funding is not the only constraint on participation of developing-country non-governmental organizations, though it is of great importance. Other constraints include lack of access to information and education, and poor legal frameworks regarding non-governmental organization structures. For example, many Governments in developing countries have no legislation regulating non-governmental organizations. The United Nations could do a lot to help build capacity for non-governmental organizations through effective information dissemination, education and awareness-raising with Governments on the important role of non-governmental organizations in national development. In this regard, further improvements to the system of information outreach were proposed, as well as more forums for discussion via electronic communications such as listservs. The use of the Internet not only to disseminate information, but also as a means of non-governmental organization input and interactive exchange of views with the United Nations should be expanded and systematized. It was noted that traditional communication methods should be sustained until everyone, particularly those non-governmental organizations in the South, has access to new technology like the Internet.

40. Some observed that non-governmental organizations were the second largest source of development assistance. They proposed that the United Nations enlarge non-governmental organization participation in the United Nations consolidated appeal formulation so that non-governmental organization initiatives and projects in the medium run can be considered, evaluated, adjusted and incorporated with cost-sharing in the country plan of action of funds, agencies and programmes of the United Nations system. Non-governmental organizations should not be regarded simply as recipients of United Nations assistance or clients of grants. A cost-sharing approach by the United Nations and non-governmental organizations should be examined, with a well-specified set of actions to attain clear and sustainable results. A country plan of action should be made up of multiple and integrated initiatives within a framework where central and local governments and international bodies have to coordinate and facilitate the growing expression of local and hidden or disregarded skills and resources of non-governmental organizations.

41. Many non-governmental organizations commented on the contrast between statements made by high-level United Nations officials as to how indispensable non-governmental organizations were in fostering the work of the United Nations, and their view that, at the same time, non-governmental organizations were facing significant setbacks in their ability to fully participate in the consultative process. An unrecognized contradiction was the effort to increase non-governmental organization participation while simultaneously other steps were being taken to restrict it.

42. Many non-governmental organizations thought that the report should stress the role of non-governmental organization networks in terms of further enhancing non-governmental organization participation. Networks cover wide geographical areas and bring together a considerable number of skilled and highly motivated people; their actions and projects are mostly global in approach and efficient. Networks are effective in follow-up activities as well as monitoring, and they also enhance collaboration on specific targets, thereby reducing considerably the paperwork, the communication effort and the tedious process of identification of all individual organizations potentially interested in common action.

43. It was noted that the relationship between non-governmental organizations and the United Nations was evolving as new ways of working and new approaches to global decision-making were developed. For non-governmental organizations, this brings new responsibilities. Active participation in the work of the United Nations should carry with it the duty to reflect the priorities of a broader constituency and keep that constituency informed of these international processes. Some non-governmental organizations stated that for Governments an influx of new actors to United Nations decision-making may cause difficulties — and some may oppose these changes because they undermine the status of the State in the work of the United Nations. This defensiveness is misplaced. There are issues that require global attention, and as regards which the peoples of the world should try to agree to a common response. Governments should give due thought to the views

of key sectors of global civil society in order to arrive at solutions that meet their expectations and take their concerns and priorities into account. This kind of approach should come to characterize the work of the United Nations. The ways in which the non-governmental organization Steering Committee of the Commission on Sustainable Development has worked over the past five years may provide some useful examples which can be built on in other contexts.

Appointment of non-governmental organization liaison officers and focal points

44. The report highlighted the fact that most substantive United Nations departments had appointed non-governmental organization liaison officers and focal points in order to improve communications between officials of these departments and non-governmental organization representatives. Opinions differ concerning the call of the Secretary-General for all departments that have not done so yet to appoint a non-governmental organization liaison officer. In their responses, some supported the proposal. Others felt that there was no need for further appointments of non-governmental organization liaison officers and focal points. Instead they stressed the need for a comprehensive performance review mechanism. The view that liaison officers must improve their focus and efficiency and must be provided with dedicated budgets was expressed. A functional non-governmental organization focal point should have prioritized terms of reference with measurable targets; should not be burdened with many unrelated additional tasks; and should have a dedicated budget to develop activities. It was also specified that close cooperation among the various focal points should be promoted so that synergy in the use of the information and facilities available to them could be achieved.

45. In their responses, many non-governmental organizations expressed support for the steps that United Nations departments and agencies were taking to appoint one or several non-governmental organization liaison officers to facilitate access for non-governmental organizations to the United Nations. It was emphasized that appropriate staff levels, the quality of communication, and funding allocated for this needed to be improved, as well as better training to facilitate the integration and utilization of non-governmental organization expertise and resources in the work of the United Nations. Many non-governmental organizations also supported increased staff for the non-governmental organization Section of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

Access to information

46. Another important issue for non-governmental organizations, especially the ones from the developing hemisphere, is access to information. The importance of Web sites in disseminating information to the public was stressed. Agencies, funds and programmes were urged to be innovative so as to enhance their ability to communicate with the international community at large and to improve public access to United Nations information. As one Member State underlined in his response, non-governmental organization insistence on information disclosure has brought about more transparency and accountability in the United Nations system. In respect of keeping up with this trend, information systems and databases should be centralized and continuously updated. They should also be made accessible to non-connected developing countries non-governmental organizations through UNDP's network of 130 country offices.

47. As regards the question of access to information, intergovernmental organizations and specialized agencies stressed that computerized databases played an important role in ensuring participation by non-governmental organizations from all parts of the world. FAO said it supported the idea of developing an interface among the non-governmental organization/civil society organization databases existing at the headquarters level of the various United Nations system agencies and programmes. Developing shared databases at the country level was, in FAO's view, equally a priority. FAO noted that it was practically impossible to maintain, at one global level, data on the thousands of national and local non-governmental organizations in every country. The International Maritime Organization (IMO) agreed that a single database encompassing all non-governmental organizations was neither feasible nor necessarily useful, and indicated that IMO was willing to exchange information on non-governmental organizations across the system with NGLS, as outlined in paragraphs 72 and 73 of the report. WHO noted that in working to enhance the participation of non-governmental organizations, WHO intended to promote transparency and information exchange through mechanisms such as databases on non-governmental organizations active as partners in development. UNESCO broadly agreed with the recommendations made in section V of the report (on databases, NGLS, participation of regional and national non-governmental organizations in developing regions, and establishment of a trust fund). UNESCO further recommended that some harmonization of efforts towards non-governmental organization networking on the regional

level be conducted system-wide to ensure efficient use of funds and to avoid duplication.

48. To promote broad-based participation of non-governmental organizations in the work of the United Nations, the non-governmental organization Section of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs is developing a user-friendly, integrated and coordinated database profiling the non-governmental organizations in consultative status and their areas of expertise. This database is intended to serve as the central point for information management on non-governmental organizations. It is, moreover, intended to be compatible with other existing databases. The second phase of development of the programme involves the integration of the Section's database with an electronic mail server and the World Wide Web server to create a permanent electronic framework so as to facilitate and document the participation of non-governmental organizations in the work of the United Nations. The programme will, *inter alia*, enable search by country, region, interest and sectors of activities. It will also facilitate the dissemination of United Nations documents and information to non-governmental organizations and on non-governmental organizations to the other parts of the United Nations system.

49. At Headquarters, non-governmental organizations have the possibility to access, without charge, ODS on computers reserved for use exclusively by non-governmental organizations in the Department of Public Information/non-governmental organization Section Resource Centre and also at the Dag Hammarskjöld Library. The Secretariat is at the moment studying the question of the expansion of the Organization's ODS. A working group composed of representatives from the Secretary-General's Office for External Relations, Information Technology Services Division, the Department of Public Information and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs was set up in order to discuss ways and means of making the system more accessible to non-governmental organizations. Some Member States responded that they were in favour of making information available to non-governmental organizations through electronic and other cost-effective means. Moreover, they felt that non-governmental organizations should not be subjected to an access fee for the use of ODS, as such costs were prohibitive for many of them, especially the ones from the developing countries. Some Member States believed, however, that the costs incurred by such an expansion could be very high and noted that United Nations Information Centres currently provided access to information, free of charge. It was also suggested, as an alternative, to upgrade the services provided by individual information centres.

50. As regards ODS, non-governmental organizations felt it should be available free of charge. They noted that the $1,125 annual fee was discriminatory to non-governmental organizations from developing countries who could not afford it. The Treaty Database should also be freely accessible. The treaties in the database are commitments made by Member States to the international community and to their own peoples. As a point of fundamental importance, those who seek to uphold the rights of those peoples should have free access to these documents. However, some non-governmental organizations consider ODS cumbersome, sometimes of limited utility (when lacking a printer) and in fact inferior to alternative information technology that may be available. It was noted that the report did not fully explore the growing possibilities of existing or rapidly evolving technology which might enhance the participation of non-governmental organizations in distant locations. Interactive, as compared with one-way communication, is becoming increasingly feasible. In many instances these methods may be used partly as a bridge in respect of the physical limits to non-governmental organization access at the United Nations offices. Greater attention should be given to sharing information with non-governmental organizations at the regional, subregional and national levels.

51. A number of non-governmental organizations felt that the report lacked an analysis of the impact of the United Nations Web site and the availability of documentation on-line, as well as the availability of documents at Headquarters, and the cost of printing and purchase of paper. The existence of the Web site has undoubtedly decreased the number of documents non-governmental organizations collect from United Nations facilities and this should be reflected when discussing the cost and logistic implications of increased non-governmental organization interaction with the United Nations. All the information that the United Nations provides, especially that of NGLS is useful; it is important that national non-governmental organizations get a regular supply. In this regard, information about the availability of publications, newsletters, information updates and so forth should be circulated through the regular United Nations Web site. It should be noted that information is also disseminated through the Department of Public Information/non-governmental organization Section's weekly briefings.

52. Data on non-governmental organizations and non-governmental organization-related issues are already available on the Web site run by the non-governmental organization Section (http://www.un.org/esa/coordination/non-governmental organization/). In the near future, the Web site will make available additional information compiled

from sources such as the quadrennial reports submitted by non-governmental organizations on their activities.

53. The matter of ineffective distribution of documents was raised repeatedly by non-governmental organizations. Many non-governmental organizations observed that they faced a chronic problem in obtaining negotiating documents in a timely fashion. They mentioned that consistently, during intergovernmental meetings, the distribution office would hold back in providing documents, claiming that they were not available, or contending that they had been distributed in a non-governmental organization room where they could never be found. Because, in their view, the distribution staff is unwilling to provide non-governmental organizations with the working documents while the negotiations are going on, it is often impossible to follow the sessions and provide a timely response to delegates' requests for non-governmental organization input on negotiations. It was recommended that non-governmental organizations in consultative status, especially those without access to the Web/Internet, should receive a copy of the annual calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations, as available, in advance of meetings. It was also noted that non-governmental organization representatives from developing countries often face translation problems when they arrive. Documents are not available in all the languages — that is, when they are available at all to non-governmental organizations. The working language in informal meetings and in non-governmental organization discussions and dialogue sessions is almost always English. Only non-governmental organizations with large budgets can overcome this by helping to provide assistance.

54. Many non-governmental organizations supported the evaluation of current databases, to be undertaken by NGLS. Many disagreed with paragraph 72 of last year's report, in which it was said that the creation of a single non-governmental organization database would not be useful. They said that it would indeed be useful for non-governmental organizations and would eliminate duplication within the United Nations system.

Participation in the work of the General Assembly

55. The issue of participation of non-governmental organizations in the work of the General Assembly was the subject of much comment. In their responses, many Member States believed that this question deserved primary attention and should be concluded during the forthcoming fifty-fourth session of the Assembly. As regards the proposition that certain non-governmental organizations holding consultative status with the Economic and Social Council should be allowed to sit in the Assembly when discussions on economic and social issues were taking place, some Member States were of the view that this did not entirely correspond to the spirit of Council decision 1996/297. In fact, in this decision the Council recommended that the Assembly examine the question of participation of non-governmental organizations in all areas of the work of the United Nations. One Member State noted that non-governmental organizations had been participating informally and to a certain degree in the work of the Assembly's Main Committees and several of its subsidiary bodies. In that regard, the same Member State observed that non-governmental organizations' role in the work of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee was limited to petitioning and thus did not imply that non-governmental organizations actually participated in the work of the Assembly's Main Committees. The United Nations being an intergovernmental organization, the Member State was of the opinion that non-governmental organizations' involvement should focus on providing information and consultation. Another Member State did not deem it necessary to create a non-governmental organization-designated area in the Assembly, especially when political items were under discussion. It felt that access to information and the ability of non-governmental organizations to follow intergovernmental discussions of a political nature could be ensured by means of administrative and technical arrangements implemented by the Secretary-General.

56. In their replies, a number of Member States were of the view that the existing practice of the General Assembly in terms of non-governmental organization participation, for instance, in its committees, should be reaffirmed. Furthermore, these Member States were looking forward to broadening the participation of non-governmental organizations beyond the existing practice, including through access to a number of seats in an appropriately designated area of the General Assembly Hall. It was suggested that, on the basis of privileges analogous to those provided by Council resolution 1996/31, rules of procedure for non-governmental organization access could be adopted. A landmark event such as the Millennium Assembly could be used to launch these procedures. These Member States also supported the idea of establishing special arrangements for non-governmental organization participation during the special sessions of the Assembly dedicated to the follow-up of major United Nations conferences and summits. It was noted that, with the process of integrated follow-up to the major world conferences and summits under way, Member

States had a particular responsibility to consult widely and to cooperate with partners in civil society to implement successfully the goals agreed at these very same conferences. Civil society made an invaluable contribution to the process of identifying those goals and, and in many instances, constructive engagement of civil society was essential to their achievement.

57. Many non-governmental organizations felt that the report should analyse best practices for non-governmental organization access and participation and make creative suggestions as to how these best practices could become minimum standards for non-governmental organization participation in not only the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies, but also the General Assembly and its committees. They were of the opinion that the report should make creative suggestions on ways to enhance substantive dialogue between Member States and non-governmental organizations, through informal dialogues, panels and so on. A number of non-governmental organizations recommended that the United Nations take the necessary steps to formalize non-governmental organization participation in the work of the Assembly, its Main Committees and special sessions, especially those that undertook reviews of major conferences. The practice of informal participation allows, in reality, only the participation of established non-governmental organizations at the expense of promoting a civil society enabling environment with regard to matters pertaining to the United Nations.

Access to United Nations Headquarters

58. In its response, a Member State noted that access to United Nations premises and meeting rooms should correspond to the logistic possibilities and the requirements of order and security. It reaffirmed the need to ensure the presence at each meeting of at least one representative of any non-governmental organization that was entitled to attend. It reiterated the need to establish guidelines for the process of the accreditation of non-governmental organization representatives to meetings of the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies, for the purpose of which a continuous process of consultations with non-governmental organizations themselves should be maintained.

59. In their responses, many non-governmental organizations indicated that current seating arrangements in the General Assembly plenary were inadequate, particularly as they did not provide for access to documentation or speeches. They felt that the report addressed the matter of seating arrangements in the Assembly from only a limited financial and legal perspective. In practice, non-governmental organizations in consultative status have been given access to seats in plenary, as well as to the conference rooms where the Main Committees of the Assembly meet, at the discretion of the Chairs of these bodies. Non-governmental organizations noted that a number of bearer passes for access to the Assembly Hall had been issued to non-governmental organizations as well as passes for access to the second floor. In the past two years, however, no passes for the Assembly Hall had been issued, and access to the second floor was to remain restricted throughout the year. Non-governmental organizations also indicated that listening devices in the balconies of the Assembly Hall as well as in other rooms were not working properly and they were thus unable to follow the proceedings of the meetings. In this regard, the Facilities Management Division of the United Nations Secretariat was asked to look into the matter, and the necessary steps to remedy this situation have been taken.

60. Many non-governmental organizations mentioned that in the past they had had access to the second floor hallways outside the Security Council Chamber, the Trusteeship Council Chamber, the Economic and Social Council Chamber and the Delegates Lounge. New restrictions have been imposed on some of these areas. Non-governmental organizations noted that access to meeting places stipulated in Council resolution 1996/31 should not require further consultation with Governments. Many non-governmental organizations were very disturbed by the recent curtailment of United Nations access for non-governmental organizations. Even though, as paragraph 31 says, "very few incidents of a disruptive nature involving non-governmental organizations have occurred," the practical arrangements made at Headquarters over the past several months have consistently curtailed non-governmental organization access and have made conducting work more difficult and, in their view, at times even impossible.

61. As far as security is concerned, non-governmental organizations were of the view that security procedures should be instituted on a universal, non-discriminatory basis for all persons entering United Nations facilities. Such procedures exist elsewhere, such as at the United Nations Office at Geneva, and are understood as necessary. Non-governmental organizations reject the implication that their representatives constitute a greater security threat than any other persons entering United Nations premises, since they are required to go through a metal detector at the Secretariat entrance. In their view, applying these procedures to only one category of individuals does nothing for the security of the premises and creates a sense of discrimination among those targeted. Non-governmental organizations felt that a

properly functioning credentialling and identification/badging system for all would eliminate the need for such inappropriate discrimination against non-governmental organizations. They were of the opinion that the Security and Safety Service of the United Nations Secretariat should carefully define all rules relating to searches of non-governmental organizations beyond the perimeter security zone, after full consultation, and should publish these rules so that they were clear to all. The report should note that the growing number of non-governmental organizations had not led to increased logistic or political difficulties for the work of the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies. This would be relevant to some of the contentions about numbers presented, with a rationale related to security concerns, with which most non-governmental organizations disagree, based on statistical data. Some non-governmental organizations were concerned that security pretenses by the Secretariat were used to please some Member States that might wish to insulate themselves as much as possible from interaction with non-governmental organizations despite public statements to the contrary.

62. Pursuant to extensive consultations on the issue of access to United Nations Headquarters by non-governmental organizations, on 19 April 1999 the Secretariat circulated an information note to representatives of accredited non-governmental organizations. The note elaborated on the existing arrangements and specifically addressed the issue of entry into United Nations Headquarters including access to the second floor of the Conference Building and related matters. According to the note, the General Assembly Hall would continue to be a restricted area. Fifty seats at the front of the fourth-floor balcony were reserved for members of accredited non-governmental organizations who wished to attend meetings of the Assembly. It was decided that, during the General Debate and when heightened security considerations required extra measures, access to the second floor of the Conference Building by members of non-governmental organizations should not be permitted. Members of accredited non-governmental organizations would be permitted to gain access to meetings of the Economic and Social Council, its subsidiary bodies and other meetings of relevant organs to which they had been invited and which were held in the chambers of the second floor. At all other times, members of accredited non-governmental organizations must be in possession of a special pass in order to access the second floor of the Conference Building.

V. Recommendations

Recommendations of Member States

63. Member States responding provided the recommendations for bringing more transparency to the relationship between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations and providing for better communication among the various partners. They are presented below:

(a) The setting up of a United Nations body responsible for handling related issues; the possible expansion of the mandate of the Committee on non-governmental organizations; and the establishment of a special examining and approval process that would deal with non-governmental organization participation in United Nations activities;

(b) A decentralized approach, which would allow programmatic flexibility at the working levels, was an effective and efficient way for the United Nations system to work with non-governmental organizations;

(c) Agencies, funds and programmes must work together with non-governmental organizations to establish appropriate accountability and review mechanisms for their working relationship. Such mechanisms would help institute transparency in all aspects of the United Nations-non-governmental organization relationship, particularly in the establishment of the decision-making process, ethical standards and measurable programme indicators. The arrangements must be amenable to independent verification, inspection and assessment. To increase transparency, a Member State suggested that the Committee on non-governmental organizations should consult on a regular basis with the non-governmental organization community, preferably before and after each of its regular and resumed sessions to review methods of work, accreditation procedures and review of quadrennial reports;

(d) A Member State urged the Secretary-General to update Secretary-General's bulletin ST/SGB/209 of 21 December 1984, which sets out the policies and procedures within the Secretariat for non-governmental organization participation, to reflect Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 and the new developments in the United Nations-non-governmental organization relationship. A comprehensive performance review would provide a basis for further strategies and actions. A joint United Nations-non-governmental organization work plan with specific and measurable targets was needed in order to improve relations and institutionalize efficient modes of cooperation. The

Inter-Departmental Working Group on non-governmental organizations could be given a specific mandate in terms of expected outputs. The important issue of coordination was also raised. Non-governmental organizations will have to work with the United Nations through certain channels — like networks and interest groups — that include partners from developing countries and are capable of elaborating common positions and appointing representatives;

(e) One Member State proposed the exploration of potential synergies with the many existing non-governmental organization small grant programmes. Coordination was needed in this field in order to lower transaction costs and to launch joint actions to mobilize additional resources;

(f) The radical streamlining of the overly bureaucratic processes governing the disbursement of project funds and the recruitment of project personnel at the local level was also proposed;

(g) As the number of applications for consultative status increases, measures should be taken to increase the level and quality of Secretariat support to the Committee on non-governmental organizations;

(h) One important task was to put in place an efficient process to evaluate current procedures and then make proposals on improvements.

Recommendations of specialized agencies of the United Nations system and intergovernmental organizations

64. Specialized agencies of the United Nations system and intergovernmental organizations mainly provided additional information regarding their policies and initiatives. However, they presented the following recommendations in their submissions:

(a) A single database encompassing all non-governmental organizations would be neither feasible nor necessarily useful;

(b) Consistency should be used throughout the United Nations system when referring to United Nations non-State actors. In certain instances, the terminology of civil society organizations was used in order to take into account the wide range of non-State actors including non-governmental organizations, the business community, labour unions and academia;

(c) There was a need to make a clearer distinction between the arrangements of the Department of Public Information of the United Nations Secretariat and those of the Economic and Social Council, since it was noted that non-governmental organizations accredited with the Department of Public Information claimed consultative status with the United Nations;

(d) Some harmonization of efforts at non-governmental organization networking on the regional level should be conducted system-wide to ensure efficient use of funds and avoid duplication.

Recommendations of non-governmental organizations

65. As for non-governmental organizations, they also submitted the recommendations for improving the relationship with the United Nations. They are presented below:

(a) The Secretariat should become a focal point for facilitating the operational relationship of non-governmental organizations in consultative status with various United Nations bodies and programmes;

(b) Present arrangements for non-governmental organizations, while commendable, could be enhanced with both enlargement of the non-governmental organization sections at the United Nations Secretariat, and the creation of specifically equipped non-governmental organization liaison units in all Member States. The establishment of a single office in the United Nations Secretariat headed at the Under-Secretary-General level, on United Nations/non-governmental organization relations throughout the system was supported by some non-governmental organizations;

(c) Concerned United Nations agencies should consider applications for operational partnership and assistance directly from those non-governmental organizations that were in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. Concern was expressed about the bottleneck caused by the need for Governments to approve applications for United Nations financial assistance to non-governmental organizations at the operational level;

(d) The Department of Public Information/non-governmental organization Section's orientation programme for non-governmental organizations should be held at least twice a year, and workshops organized to promote information and education about how to make better use of the United Nations information through channels like Web sites, newsletters and teleconferencing;

(e) Establishment of a single high-level non-governmental organization office at the United Nations to

consolidate the numerous United Nations non-governmental organization databases. One non-governmental organization proposed that the United Nations work with the Union of International Associations (UIA) which not only houses organizational information on thousands of non-governmental organizations but also profiles 10,000 issues identified by these groups. This service has been available on the Web since 1998. There is an interactive version being developed to facilitate participation of non-governmental organizations in distant locations;

(f) It was proposed that international non-governmental organizations find financing for their national associations outside State budgets, which would make them more independent and more apt to represent their society. Some international non-governmental organizations were opposed, in this connection, to the establishment of a trust fund for "other" non-governmental organizations;

(g) Regional economic and social commissions should become better skilled at developing non-governmental organization relations at the regional and national levels, with a view to constructing policy and operational partnerships at those levels in implementing United Nations decisions and programmes as well as outcomes of international conferences;

(h) It was proposed that all non-governmental organizations in status with the United Nations receive information about CCPOQ and, in collaboration with NGLS, organize an inter-agency consultation on operational collaboration with non-governmental organizations;

(i) United Nations offices at the country level should take a more proactive role in engaging with national and regional non-governmental organizations, not only on operational issues but also on broader political and policy issues that are dealt with by intergovernmental processes. UNDP and United Nations Information Centres field offices could take a more active role in educating and sensitizing national non-governmental organizations about how the United Nations system functions and how non-governmental organizations might best work with it;

(j) An annual civil society forum should be held to relate to the regular sessions of the General Assembly, as proposed by the Commission on Global Governance. National civil societies should each have two seats; additional seats should be available for unrepresented peoples. International civil society should have at least 200 seats and should be represented through thematic associations formed specifically for representation to the Forum;

(k) Delegations should agree to the posting of draft texts, non-papers and other non-public documents on a selective basis, to strengthen the consultation process, especially for non-governmental organizations not based in New York and Geneva.

66. As specified previously, the present report does not encompass all the views presented by the Member States, members of the specialized agencies, observers and intergovernmental organizations, as well as those of non-governmental organizations from all regions, on document A/53/170. It has, however, tried to reflect the most important points of views submitted by all concerned on key issues affecting the relationship between the non-governmental organizations and the United Nations.